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SUBJECT: Asian Ministerial Continues Efforts to Prevent Extinction  
of Wild Tigers

Ref: 09 Kathmandu 394; 09 Kathmandu 1002 (C) 09 Bangkok 2963 (D) 09  
Bangkok 709

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1. (U) Summary: In a ministerial meeting hosted by Thailand and the World Bank's Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) last month, thirteen tiger range states issued a joint declaration to stem the alarming decline of tigers in the wild, through regional law enforcement and country action plans. They agreed to work to double the current population of 3,200 wild tigers by 2022, and to plan to set up a multi-donor trust fund or some similar arrangement before a heads of government forum Russia will host in September. In preparation for the forum, the Bank and Indonesia will host a partners' dialogue in June. Many participants agreed that greater involvement in GTI decisions and planning by tiger range states would strengthen its efforts to increase the number of tigers in the wild. With illegal trade the greatest short term threat, India, China and others announced various transboundary anti-trafficking agreements. While little progress was made in solidifying a South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SA-WEN), the USG-supported Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) was

highlighted for its successes. Challenges remain: convening 13 heads of government, developing funding mechanisms and refining national tiger conservation action plans. End Summary.

#### MINISTERIAL AFFIRMS TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

12. (SBU) Thailand and the World Bank's Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) hosted the first Asian Ministerial Conference on Tiger Conservation in Hua Hin from January 27-29. The Bank leads GTI, a partnership that includes the Smithsonian and the International Tiger Coalition, a group of 39 non-governmental organizations. This meeting, which followed up on the recommendations of GTI's October Kathmandu Global Tiger Workshop (ref B) is one of a series of GTI-sponsored gatherings aimed at mobilizing support to stop the decline of tigers in the wild, now estimated to number only 3,200 worldwide. Thirteen tiger range states attended, with environment ministers representing Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand, and high level representatives attending from Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Russia and Vietnam. (Note: Part of North Korea lies within the range that could support tigers, but there is no recent confirmation of tigers there, and North Korea was not present. End Note.)

13. (SBU) Thailand's Natural Resources and Environment Minister Suwit Khunkitti welcomed delegates. (Note: World Wildlife Fund awarded Suwit the J. Paul Getty Award for Conservation leadership at the meeting, for domestic conservation and for his leadership in setting up the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network. End Note.) Video messages from Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and World Bank President Robert Zoellick stressed the need for range state cooperation at all levels to prevent threatened extinction due to habitat loss, declining prey and poaching. Zoellick also suggested

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range states adopt the science-based recommendations of the Kathmandu meeting.

14. (SBU) The meeting adopted a declaration calling for intensified cooperation in wildlife law enforcement and for the creation within nine months of a multi-donor trust fund or some similar flexible financing arrangement for tiger conservation. The range state representatives also agreed to focus attention on tiger conservation during the lunar "year of the tiger" in 2010, and to work to double the global number of tigers in the wild by 2022, the next lunar year of the tiger. (Note: During the Senior Official's Meeting that preceded the Ministerial, representatives expressed concern that while the doubling of tigers would be the goal for each nation, several smaller states with smaller tiger populations would not be able to double; the group agreed that the declaration would reflect doubling as a global goal to which all range states would contribute. End Note.)

15. (SBU) The Declaration stressed the need to balance conservation and development. After an extensive discussion on habitat definitions and strategies, representatives pledged that range states would zone corridors and buffer zones that were not already protected areas, and not support or finance development projects that would harm tiger conservation. Thailand announced it would connect the three Huai Kha Khaeng forest reserves as a corridor for around 300 tigers. (Comment: There are some interesting avenues for conservation and greenhouse gas reduction based on NGO presentations. For example, peatlands are in some cases also tiger habitat; if Indonesia agreed to stop conversion of peatlands, it could serve a double purpose. One presentation used work in Peru to show how satellite data could be used to synchronize carbon inventories within tiger range states, suggesting an avenue for U.S. technical expertise to assist. NASA data in the past was helpful in mapping conservation for the Congo Basin. End Comment.)

#### TRADE AND TRANSNATIONAL AGREEMENTS: SOME THERE, SOME NOT

16. (SBU) As range countries presented national actions to date, a number of transborder agreements to cooperate in fighting the tiger trade were highlighted: Nepal/India; Nepal/China; Thailand/Laos; Thailand/Burma; and Laos/Vietnam. Thai Minister Suwit called for an Asia wide Wildlife Enforcement Network (WEN) to replicate success of

the ASEAN WEN that Thailand hosts. (Ref B) (Comment: Noticeably lacking was mention of China/India cooperation. Hopefully Nepal can play a pivotal role to stop the India/Nepal/China tiger trade nexus. NGO and donor support will be particularly critical to help range states manage these arrangements. The USG-supported ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network is indeed a good model with its successful transborder investigations. An OES-funded grant to UN Office on Drugs and Crime will connect UN anti-trafficking efforts with

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ASEAN-WEN. The NGO community will focus on support for transnational tiger trade interdiction in its work plan for the Vladivostok forum. End Comment.)

17. (SBU) In the declaration the range states pledged to protect tigers by eliminating international trade in tigers and tiger parts through laws and enforcement. China expressed reservations about a separate trade section making permanent a trade ban for tigers and tiger parts. (Note: China and Thailand have a number of Tiger "farms" where tiger part trade is supposedly prohibited but widely suspected of occurring. End Note.)

#### SOUTH ASIA WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT NETWORK

18. (SBU) This Ministerial failed to act on plans endorsed at the Kathmandu meeting to make the South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SA-WEN) a functioning network (REF B). SA-WEN, established by regional environment ministers in May 2008, has never actually begun operations, and a planned experts' meeting to facilitate SA-WEN has yet to occur. In Kathmandu, Nepal offered, with India's support to house the SA-WEN secretariat; at this Ministerial, India suggested that South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) approval needed to be obtained before SA-WEN can begin operations. India persuaded delegates to remove references to SA-WEN from the declaration. However, NGO TRAFFIC reported from a meeting last week that Indian Forest Minister Jairam Ramesh promised to help move SAWEN forward. At the Ministerial, there was a side meeting among the four South Asia countries present (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) to plan how SA-WEN should be run; the upcoming SA-WEN Expert's group meeting, which India proposed to host, would seek agreement among all eight members on a work plan and acceptance of Nepal's offer to host the secretariat. In a previous meeting with Regional South Asia Hub officer, Nepal's Forestry Minister expressed eagerness to toughen regional enforcement and was interested in technical assistance and funding. Nepal's National Trust for Nature Conservation, an NGO, has asked USAID-supported NGO Freeland to set up training replicating the ASEAN WEN model.

#### NGO SUPPORT, THE GTI AND AB INTERNATIONAL TRUST FUND?

9. (SBU)

The delegates pledged to mobilize domestic funding through mechanisms such as payment for environmental services (PES), but they also called on international donors to help fund tiger conservation. Most of the NGOs involved in Tiger Conservation attended the Ministerial and held extensive side meetings to plan support. World Wildlife Fund agreed to lead development of a work plan of NGO support that would be ready by the Vladivostok forum. In the declaration, the states agreed to update national action plans, but they also called on the international community to set up a trust fund or similar flexible funding arrangements before the forum. (Note: Nothing concrete came out of the Ministerial to solidify a plan for the trust fund. End Note.)

10. (SBU) At the side meetings, NGOs, donors, multilateral banks and

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range state representatives agreed that the Bank's Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) would benefit from greater range state involvement.

Governmental involvement would provide clarity about GTI goals, and initiatives post-Vladivostok. In the 20-month existence of the GTI, the Bank has funded and held several large international meetings, including this Ministerial and provided a million dollars for a program to train trainers in tiger conservation techniques. At the Hua Hin meeting, the Bank announced (after some pressure from India) that the first phase of the training will be for six weeks at the Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun to be followed, by two weeks the U.S. at the Smithsonian's Front Royal Virginia facility.

Separately, the bank will also host a GTI Executive Leadership Forum to provide training for senior officials from April 15-21 in Washington right before the spring International Monetary Fund meetings; Ministers from Nepal and Thailand have given tentative indications they may attend.

NEXT STEPS: INDONESIA, RUSSIA, INDIA MEETINGS

¶11. (SBU) Russia announced that PM Vladimir Putin would host the September tiger forum at the heads of government level in Vladivostok. (Note: The Bank sees this forum as the culmination of its effort to mobilize high-level political will to reverse the decline of tiger populations. End Note.) Russia and the Bank provided few details about the forum other than timing; Russia agreed to reconsider the September 11-12 date after delegates noted its conflict with the Muslim holiday Eid. Indonesia agreed to host, with the Bank a GTI partners' dialogue in June to discuss funding and other topics. India also announced that it still plans to hold a separate high-level meeting on tiger conservation, perhaps in November 2010. The range state representatives agreed to the Nepalese Forest Minister's proposal to celebrate July 29 as tiger awareness day, in part to publicize the Vladivostok forum.

#### COMMENTS

¶12. (SBU) The Bank has yet to identify funding sources for the kind of pilot demonstration projects Bank President Zoellick called for in his video address, or to interest regional nations to jointly seek low-interest Bank loans for tiger conservation. The forthcoming meetings in Jakarta and Vladivostok will provide the Bank an opportunity to establish a greater role for tiger range states in GTI planning and decision making, and to clarify GTI goals and future initiatives. Resolving these important matters would greatly strengthen the effort to bring tigers back from the brink of extinction by doubling the number of wild tigers.

¶13. (SBU) The several international agreements listed at the forum were positive indications of the transborder cooperation necessary to stop the tiger trade. India's insistence on holding its own Tiger meeting after Vladivostok seemed to signal a limit to how much that range state would allow the Bank and GTI to take the lead in international tiger conservation. China came to the Ministerial

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with a deep delegation, well-prepared and with clear positions on matters such as trade. Both China and India appeared firm in wanting to claim leadership in international tiger conservation efforts and not leave it to the Bank, NGOs or others.

¶14. (U) A significant unanswered question is who would set up a Tiger trust fund before the September forum. The World Bank has not identified funding sources for the fund and no donors have indicated interest beyond continuing existing environmental funding and plans for funding that includes programs which benefit tigers. Also important will be commitments from range states for concrete action plans. With ASEAN WEN, member state ownership and funding is equally important, with the need for member states to contribute funds and send law enforcement officers to the ASEAN WEN headquarters in Bangkok. SAWEN will face similar challenges as it emerges.

¶15. (SBU) The attendance of only four range state ministers was a disappointment, calling into some question the convening power of the Bank and GTI and suggesting a challenge for Russia to convene with the Bank a meeting for thirteen heads of state. China, Malaysia and others expressed concern that the initial draft declaration would commit range states beyond the authority of the environment ministries represented, and various references were dropped relating to infrastructure or finance. The heads of government forum planned for September would hopefully provide the venue for governmental commitments that cut across ministries.

¶16. The overarching challenge will be solidifying range state ownership of the GTI. Many NGO observers who have been involved with the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI, Ref D) see the strong involvement of regional nations as a possible model for GTI. Perhaps the thirteen tiger states need to similarly own the Asian tiger initiative, with GTI, the Global Tiger Fund and other entities playing a supporting role. The greatest short term threat to survival is the trade in tigers and their parts, so strengthening ASEAN and SA WEN will be vital; an OES grant for this year aims to

do that.

JOHN